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homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

FRIDAY, August 15, 1941

SUBJECT: "CARE OF FOOD IN THE SUMMER." Information from home economists of the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Well, here we are--right in the middle of the hot sultry dog days again. And here are some special hot weather tips on the care you need to take with the family food supply, to make sure it stays in good condition in spite of the heat and the humidity.

I'd like to pass on to you some pointers on taking care of foods in the summer--some pointers that came to me from the home economists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. And by the way--you might pass these tips on to the man of the house--if he's going to be family cook and bottlewasher anytime you're away this summer.

First of all, the home economists take up MILK -- CREAM -- and RAW MEAT. They say these are the foods that are most likely to spoil the fastest at any time of the year.

All of them--milk, cream, and raw meat--need to be kept at a temperature at least as low as 45 degrees Fahrenheit. And be especially careful with raw meat -- because this may spoil enough to make it very dangerous to eat--and still not have any bad odor or taste.

If you have a refrigerator and a special meat compartment in that--keep the meat there. If you have no such meat compartment, cover the meat lightly with paraffin paper and put it in a shallow dish. Of course, you'll remember to take the store wrapping from the meat as soon as you get it home. Don't keep any raw meat on hand for more than 2 or 3 days at a time at normal refrigerator temperatures. And don't keep ground raw meat more than 24 to 48 hours. As for liver and meat organs--use them the same day you buy them.

Keep milk and cream covered tightly. And try to have on hand only as much as you can use up every day.

Next on my list is BUTTER and CHEESE. These aren't hard to keep if you just take a little care with them. Butter picks up odors easily. So keep it tightly covered. If you buy print butter, you can store it in the carton that it comes in. Wrap hard cheese tightly in waxed paper. Keep soft cheese in the package it comes in--either tightly covered or wrapped.

Now--here's a note about EGGS. Put eggs in the refrigerator as soon as you get them into the kitchen. And get only as many from the refrigerator at a time as you're going to use. For just a few minutes of summer kitchen temperatures can add hours to the age of an egg.

And a special warning about cooked egg dishes. These are worthy of special attention in any season. But in the summer, you always hear of many cases of food poisoning that can be traced to such dishes. All cooked egg dishes spoil quickly. So make them up on the day you want them--not before. And keep them in the refrigerator up to the time you eat them. This goes for cream puffs--for potato salad and other salads made with an egg dressing--for sandwiches made from eggs--for devilled eggs--and for custards.

Another group of foods you'll want to be especially careful about in hot weather is LEFTOVER COOKED FOODS. Try to use all leftovers a day or two after you put them away. Put them away in clean, dry dishes you can cover. And heat all leftovers before you serve them.

That about sums up the tips for taking care of the most-likely-to-spoil foods. Now just a few suggestions on some others.

Take vegetables and fruits, for example. Don't buy these far ahead of time. For they lose some of their precious vitamin values in storage. Keep salad greens in special vegetable pans or oil-silk bags, so they will stay moist and crisp.

You won't need to keep fruits in the refrigerator unless they are full-ripe. If they are slightly underripe, leaving them out at room temperature will help complete their ripening. But once they are ripe, put them in the refrigerator. Soft fruits, such as peaches and plums, need to be spread out in shallow dishes so they won't get mashed. And unless fruits have thick protective skins, keep them in covered dishes when you put them away in the refrigerator.

And here's s special tip on muskmelons. If you keep muskmelons in the refrigerator--wrap them tightly in waxed paper and store them on the top shelf of the cabinet. That way, their characteristic musky odor won't get into other foods.

On hot damp days--you'll notice that you have more trouble keeping bread, and crackers, and cookies.

A good place to keep bread any time of the year is in a tin box. Scald and air this box at least once a week. During hot summer days never shut this box tightly. On the other hand, keep crisp crackers and cookies covered tightly and don't take them out of their containers until a few minutes before you serve them.

And finally--probably most important of all--take special pains to keep your refrigerator running smoothly during these hot days. Defrost it more than usual once a week if yours is the mechanical kind. For when frost gets to more than 1/4 inch thick on the evaporator--the refrigerator temperature goes right up--and down go your chances of keeping foods cold. Keep the refrigerator clean and neatly arranged with room in between foods for free circulation of air. Try to cut down on the number of times you open the refrigerator door every day.

And that winds up my tips for taking care of food in the summer and my broadcast for today.

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